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SUBJECT: (U) Deputy Secretary Negroponte's September 11, 2008  
conversation with Vietnam DPM/FM Pham Gia Khiem

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[1](#)1. (U) September 11, 2008; 0915; Hanoi, Vietnam.

[1](#)2. (U) Participants:

U.S.  
The Deputy Secretary  
Ambassador Michael Michalak  
DAS Scot Marciel  
PolCouns Brian Aggeler  
D Special Assistant Kaye Lee  
D Special Assistant Ted Wittenstein  
DPolCouns Mike Goldman (Notetaker)

VIETNAM  
DPM/FM Pham Gia Khiem  
VFM Pham Binh Minh  
DG Americas Department Nguyen Ba Hung  
Assistant Director Americas Department Le Chi Dung  
MFA Desk Officer Tran Tan

[1](#)3. (SBU) SUMMARY. Meeting September 11, the Deputy Secretary and Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem affirmed that, overall, U.S.-Vietnam relations continue to improve. Despite differences on human rights and Vietnam's stance at the UNSC on issues such as Georgia, the two sides have made substantial progress, particularly in areas such as education, health, and trade. The Deputy Secretary urged Vietnam to come to an agreement on HCMC's consular district and emphasized that to do their jobs properly, Embassy and Consulate officers must be able to meet with persons from all strata of society, including those who might disagree with the government. Ambassador Michalak encouraged the GVN to establish a transparent mechanism to settle the ongoing property dispute at Hanoi's Thai Ha parish. DPM/FM Khiem pressed for movement on Vietnam's GSP and Market Economy status. END SUMMARY.

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BILATERAL RELATIONS IMPROVING  
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[1](#)4. (SBU) Noting Vietnam's tremendous economic progress, the Deputy Secretary remarked the country today would have been unrecognizable when he first arrived in Saigon as a Second Secretary in 1964. The Deputy Secretary and DPM/FM Khiem agreed that the bilateral relationship has likewise improved, especially in areas such as health, education, trade, and the recovery of MIA remains. The two sides should work to deepen their exchanges on political and security matters, the Deputy Secretary and DPM/FM Khiem affirmed, pointing to annual port calls and the October visit of A/S Kimmitt

to inaugurate talks on political-military affairs. Khiem stated that he looks forward to his meeting with Secretary Rice on the margins of UNGA and hopes that the U.S. and Vietnam can use the occasion to produce a "joint assessment" of the progress in bilateral relations during the eight years of the Bush administration.

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"FRIENDS TO ALL," BUT WHAT ABOUT GEORGIA?  
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15. (SBU) The Deputy Secretary urged Vietnam to work more closely with the United States at the UN Security Council, especially on issues such as Georgia. Big countries should not treat their smaller neighbors the way Russia has treated Georgia, the Deputy Secretary emphasized. DPM/FM Khiem issued a standard recitation of Vietnam's "friends to all" foreign policy, conceding only that Hanoi remains concerned with the situation in Georgia.

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HCMC CONSULAR OPERATIONS AND THE NEW EMBASSY COMPOUND  
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16. (SBU) Urged by the Deputy Secretary to make progress on negotiations over the NEC property, DPM/FM Khiem affirmed that the United States should have a "marvelous" embassy commensurate with the two countries' increasingly robust diplomatic relations. He offered to meet personally with U/S Kennedy in Hanoi to discuss the NEC. For his part, Khiem requested that the State Department facilitate the purchase of residential property in New York by Vietnam's UN mission.

17. (SBU) The Deputy Secretary pressed Khiem to recognize HCMC's consular district and to lift restrictions on consular operations outside of Ho Chi Minh City. He stressed that it was absurd to

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expect Embassy officers from Hanoi to cover territory, such as the Mekong Delta, that should naturally be the responsibility of the HCMC consulate. Khiem suggested that the issue could be resolved "step by step," but declined to go into specifics, noting that the issue would be discussed in more detail during the Deputy Secretary's afternoon meeting with the Prime Minister. Khiem expressed optimism that Vietnam would soon be able to open a consulate in Houston and the United States would have a consulate in Danang.

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HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE THAI HA PARISH  
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18. (SBU) The Deputy Secretary noted the importance of human rights and religious freedom, mentioning that the recent human rights dialogue with Vietnam had been very valuable. He emphasized that Embassy and Consulate officers, like their diplomatic colleagues at missions around the world, are committed to maintaining contact with individuals and groups representing a wide spectrum of opinion. These meetings are part of their normal work as diplomats and should not be taken as evidence of hostile intent. To the contrary, the United States is committed to looking for ways to strengthen ties with Vietnam.

19. (SBU) DPM/FM Khiem insisted that ongoing protests over land ownership at Thai Ha parish, as well as the government's response, was not a religious issue, but rather a question of individuals violating the law. He sought to assure the Deputy Secretary that Vietnam remains committed to helping religious organizations function and would assist groups find land for "genuine and legitimate purposes." He said that Vietnam's land laws are complicated, as is the history of land ownership, and decried the fact that Thai Ha parishioners had taken action outside of Vietnamese law. The Ambassador commented that this was not the first time that the GVN had found itself involved in a land dispute involving former church property (and it almost certainly wouldn't be the last) and encouraged the government to establish a clear, transparent mechanism for both sides to express their positions and

reach a reasonable solution.

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GSP AND MARKET ECONOMY STATUS  
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¶10. (SBU) Citing Prime Minister Dung's June visit to Washington, DPM/FM Khiem urged the United States to move forward in designating Vietnam as a beneficiary under the Generalized System of Preferences and in recognizing Vietnam's status as a market economy. The Deputy Secretary and Ambassador responded that GSP was under serious consideration, but that there remained work to be done on labor and intellectual property rights, as outlined by the USTR. As for Vietnam's potential status as a market economy, the U.S. side noted that Secretary Gutierrez had recently sent a letter discussing the establishment of a market economy working group.